

# Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies



## Building Relationships, Enhancing Security

By JOHN D. LAWRENCE

**T**he Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA Center) is the preeminent U.S. Government institution for building relationships and understanding in the region. Approved by the Secretary of Defense in 2000, the center was formally launched in October of that year. The youngest of the Department of Defense (DOD) regional centers, it covers one of the most diverse and volatile areas of the world, stretching from the western end of North Africa to the Himalayas—from Marrakech to Bangladesh. The region includes that part of the world where the United States has the greatest number of combat troops deployed—more than 250,000 military and civilian personnel in the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) countries alone.

Many look at the NESA region and see a confusing sea of ethnic and sectarian conflict sitting atop oil reserves and wonder how the United States can play a positive role. The NESA Center has a clear answer: through dialogue, building relationships, and constant communication and engagement, just as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated in his confirmation hearing. These are the bedrock principles of the center and are reflected in everything we do—from seminars and workshops, to sustaining engagement with current and former participants, to strategic communication and outreach efforts.

NESA Center participating countries include Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya (new in 2006), Maldives, Mauritania, Morocco, Nepal,

Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Our region includes 57 percent of USCENTCOM's countries, and 54 percent of our alumni come from this area of responsibility (AOR). The center also recently began collaborating with the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies to interface with the Central Asian states. We truly are USCENTCOM's regional center and will likely have an office in its AOR in the coming year.

The original concept of the NESA Center was both simple and controversial. It was based on the premise that Arabs and Israelis, Pakistanis and Indians, and other rival parties would come together to discuss their national security issues in a neutral setting for mutually beneficial dialogue. We

must build and sustain long-term relationships with key regional players to bring this about and thus protect and enhance U.S. vital interests.

As both the dynamics of our region and our guidance from the Secretary of Defense changed after 9/11, the NESA Center expanded its programs and activities. New programs on countering ideological support for terrorism, increasing and improving strategic communication and outreach to the region, and supporting other strategic goals have been implemented, with more coming.

In April 2006, Lieutenant General David W. Barno, USA (Ret.), was appointed the

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### Why Focus on the NESA Region?

- a region with more than 1.8 billion people—nearly 30 percent of the world's population
- a region that is the birthplace of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism
- a region with a majority of the world's oil reserves
- a region that stretches from the Sahara to the Himalayas
- a region with four nations that have, or are suspected of developing, nuclear weapons capabilities and that have frictional relationships with some of their neighbors
- a region rife with ongoing, violent border disputes for the past half-century
- a region with two state sponsors of terrorism (Syria and Iran) as well as transnational terrorist threats such as al Qaeda
- a region where U.S. and coalition partners have toppled two repressive regimes in the past 6 years
- a region that produces an overwhelming majority of the world's opium and heroin
- a region where the United States has deployed more than 250,000 military and civilian personnel
- a region at the strategic crossroads and major trade routes of Europe, Asia, and Africa

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NESA Center's Director. As the first general officer to lead the center—having been the commander of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (2003–2005) and of Task Force Warrior, which trained free Iraqi forces in Hungary (2003)—he brought new vision. Some of the changes we have instituted are detailed below. What has not changed is the center's affiliation with the National Defense University (NDU), one of the world's premier professional military education institutions. The NESACenter is collocated with NDU, and both institutions are committed to providing a world-class academic environment for students.

In his Director's Message for 2008, General Barno stated that “sustaining a strong personal connection to our alumni will remain a cornerstone of the NESACenter experience.” And it is our alumni who are the true resource for the center and for any U.S. Government personnel who attend. As of late 2007, our more than 1,500 alumni included the following senior military officers: 12 at the three- to four-star level; 47 two-stars, and 145 one-stars. These figures do not include civilian equivalents for these ranks, let alone distinguished U.S. alumni such as General Victor Renuart, USAF (commander, U.S. Northern Command), General Kevin Chilton, USAF (commander, U.S. Strategic Command), and Vice Admiral David Nichols, USN (Ret.) (former deputy commander, USCENTCOM).

### Responsive to Priorities: Jointness

The NESACenter is expanding and enhancing its programs. As directed by the Secretary of Defense and other senior DOD officials, we have focused on strengthening strategic communication and outreach efforts while at the same time adhering to the academic standards that have made the center such a well-known and respected institution. For example, we established a separate Outreach Office that handles issues ranging from communication with alumni to outreach with government stakeholders.

Moreover, we have held programs dedicated to the war on terror and have contributed to countering ideological support for terrorism. The center conducts a strategic listening post war on terror workshop with senior military, police, civilian officials, and critical opinion makers from the NESACenter region on issues related to combating extremism. The 2-day workshop involves intensive discussions on lessons learned on the ground in

combating terror and countering insurgency, focusing on practical concerns, regional perceptions, and how radical organizations recruit and train.

We work closely with the combatant commands and in particular with USCENTCOM. Our work with and for the command has included:

- direct support for the annual Eagle Resolve and Bright Star exercises
- issue-specific roundtables with experts from both the government and private sector
- direct support of commander's conferences beginning in 2002
- focused workshops with USCENTCOM on health security, border security, nonproliferation, and other issues
- outreach to the senior national representatives at Coalition Village.

Due to the geography of our region, we also work with U.S. European Command and U.S. Pacific Command and have begun to forge better ties with U.S. Special Operations Command. We will also support U.S. Africa Command when it is fully operational. In addition, we participate with our combatant commands in their theater security cooperation planning as well as their annual training program management reviews.

The NESACenter is strengthening ties with the Department of State and other agencies as we become a “test bed for interagency jointness.” This includes not only reaching out across the Government to inform agencies about the center and to share with them

our backbriefs from trips and seminars, but also actively seeking more U.S. participants from a broader spectrum of the Government. For example, in coordination with the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), we held a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) orientation in spring 2006, solely for State/USAID/DOD officials deploying on PRTs. This was the center's first U.S. Government-only event. At our August 2006 combating terrorism seminar, we welcomed three U.S. Government participants, all from the State Department (another first).

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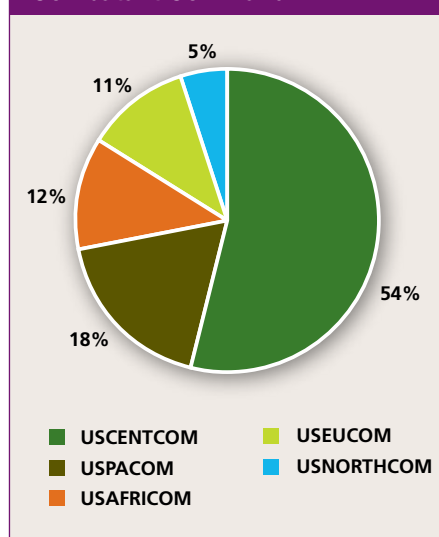
The Secretary of Defense instructed the five regional centers to increase coordination and cooperation. Although the centers' responsibilities cover the globe and their headquarters stretch across 8,000 miles and many time zones, our work together increases constantly. Since fall of 2005, for example, the regional centers' strategic communication and public affairs officers have repeatedly met to discuss efforts and to exchange ideas and lessons learned. In addition, all the centers are working to implement the Regional International Outreach system, which will facilitate communication among the centers and, ultimately, with alumni across the world.

### Core Programs

Since its inception, the NESACenter's core programs have provided the foundation upon which we have built and enhanced our mission. We hold 3½-week executive seminars for the O-5 to O-7 level and 2-week senior executive seminars for flag/general officers, as well as minister and Ambassador-level participants. In response to our participants' suggestions, the length of both seminars was extended in 2007. Topics include the American national security structure and process, the current and future regional strategic environment, counterterrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and disaster management.

These off-the-record, not-for-attribution seminars encourage a frank exchange of views primarily on issues facing the NESACenter

**NESA Alumni Distribution by Combatant Command**



region in the next 5 to 10 years when these midcareer officials will rise to senior levels. Participants are reminded when they arrive that they should speak candidly rather than use their government talking points. Seminars generally contain 35 to 40 participants from 19 to 23 countries, including the United States. Plenary sessions bring in outside speakers—senior U.S. Government officials, specialists from think tanks, and academics—to help frame broad issues and generate thinking and discussion. The real magic happens, however, in the breakout groups. These faculty-led, open discussions draw out the participants in a way that cannot happen in larger groups.

During seminars, participant site visits include the Pentagon, State Department, and Capitol Hill. On the visits, participants meet with senior officials, Members of Congress, Hill staffers, and others to learn their roles in policy formulation. In particular, the Capitol Hill visit is popular; not only do participants go to the floor of the House of Representatives to learn about congressional procedures, but they also meet lobbyists, many encountering the concept of professional advocacy for the first time. Participants are surprised to find that these lobbyists, despite their infamous reputation in the NESA region, are simply people advocating for causes in which they believe. Specifically relevant to the NESA region, participants hear from advocates for Israel, Arab countries, and India.

Terrorism is a concern to all, particularly in our region. The center conducts two 2-week combating terrorism seminars annually that bring together regional counterterrorism practitioners. These seminars take a strategic perspective, highlighting how terrorism is part of a broad network of transnational threats. Responding to popular demand, the center will add a third course in fiscal year (FY) 2009. To make progress in countering support for terrorism, we need to look at causes rather than just specific attacks. The role of the NESA Center and the other regional centers is not to tell those in the kinetic world how to do their job. As General John Abizaid, USA, former commander of U.S. Central Command, stated, the fight against terrorism and extremism should be 85 percent nonkinetic, but at the present time, it is 85 percent kinetic. The center's role is to help policymakers understand how to change this dynamic.

The NESA Center not only focuses on its region but also takes advantage of its Washington, DC, location to interface with embassies from the region. Center alumni fill senior embassy positions, but our programs also reach out to the broader embassy community. In 2005, for instance, we inaugurated a monthly Washington seminar series where we bring senior government speakers to discuss NESA region strategic issues with the diplomatic community, affording them access to officials they might not otherwise meet.

### Expanding In-region Programs

One major change of the past 2 years is a significant increase in the number of NESA Center programs held in the region and overseas. Although these programs stretch

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budgets, we made a strategic decision to hold more events. The center's FY08 in-region and overseas programs represented a 61 percent increase over FY07 and a more than 90 percent increase over FY06. These programs can be short, such as a workshop on Iraq's border security held in Jordan, or a seminar on South Asian security, co-hosted with the Asia-Pacific Center, in Sri Lanka in 2006.

We also conduct multiday bilateral programs in countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Sri Lanka, and Yemen.

**Alumni Symposium.** Our biggest event in the region thus far was our 5-year reunion in Istanbul, Turkey, in November 2005, which brought together more than 100 former participants. For 3 intense days, we discussed recent policy developments (including the Amman Hotel bombings that happened less than a week before we met) and caught up with old friends. This was a first for the NESA Center, and we plan to repeat the event regularly by reuniting alumni from a specific year, professional field, or subregion.

**Regional Network of Strategic Studies Centers.** Working with counterpart institutions, the NESA Center established a regional network of strategic studies centers, whose goal is to expand strategic dialogue and collaborative research on common security challenges. The network initiative is cosponsored by the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research, and Analysis (Pakistan); the Center for Strategic Research (Turkey); and the National Center for Strategic Studies (Jordan). The network of 30+ regional studies centers conducts business through working groups and virtual activities and seeks to foster writing that reflects viewpoints from across the region. The working groups focus on combating terrorism, nontraditional security issues, and democracy and governance, among others.

NESA Center Director, LTG David W. Barno, USA (Ret.)





### Combatant Command Support Events.

These programs include a wide variety of events in support of the three combatant commands in the NESACenter region—U.S. Central Command, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. European Command. Events may be focused geographically by subregion or country or by functional topic and are usually 3- to 5-day workshops. The center has executed such events with USCENTCOM annually from 2002 to 2004, regularly supports the Eagle Resolve exercise, and will hold a health security workshop in Jordan this August that will be the culmination of 18 months of discussion with USCENTCOM and other participants.

**Track II.** These unofficial programs are organized and conducted by a U.S. nongovernmental organization with NESACenter involvement. One program brings together senior military officers from most countries in the Middle East and the United States for semiannual nonattributable discussions on strategic issues and military concerns. The other program meets three times a year and brings together approximately 300 Middle East officials and nonofficials for intense working group sessions dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Gulf security, Mediterranean security, economic development, democracy and culture, cooperative technology measures, and women's issues. By gathering generally the same group of participants over several years—including many NESACenter alumni—the program generates a group not replicable in one-off seminars and keeps alumni engaged with the center. Besides facilitating critical regional communications, both series have resulted in actionable policy recommendations.

### Strategic Communication and Outreach

Shortly after DOD stated that strategic communication and outreach should be key regional center priorities, the NESACenter established an Office for External and Strategic Communications. Now called simply Outreach, this office handles all communication with:

- alumni after they leave our seminars
- U.S. Government stakeholders in Washington and overseas
- points of contact in U.S. Embassies overseas, as well as foreign embassies in Washington
- interagency strategic communication community

- media, both domestic and regional
- our network of 30+ strategic studies centers across our region.

The center generates a dialogue that begins with the programs and continues after the participants leave. Participants communicate with us as much as we do with them. In addition, we produce short, nonattributed backbriefs after seminars and trips that we circulate on a limited basis to senior government stakeholders. These reports contain key/new facts or opinions gleaned from discussions with participants that help senior policymakers stay informed of views to which they would not otherwise be exposed. Our backbriefs generate responses on a routine basis from the three- and four-star level, sometimes resulting in staff action.

### Participants

The NESACenter's ability to generate programs that bring NESACenter region participants together is due in large part to participating countries, whose commitment to the center is demonstrated in every seminar when they send us their best and brightest. Importantly, participants are almost equally divided between military and civilians with more military than civilians in our USCENTCOM AOR alumni. In addition to our core region, we invite several North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries to send participants, as our region is of vital concern to them as well.

The NESACenter also arranges separate meetings outside of the seminar. For example, counterterrorism specialists attend meetings with the Pentagon J5 office dealing with the war on terror. A deputy spokesman for a NATO country foreign ministry spoke with the Rapid Reaction Unit in the office of former Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes. Also, a one-star participant met with a Congressman to whom he had been introduced while the latter toured the Middle East.

While our participants are here, we stress the benefits of technology. We loan each one a laptop computer for their time in Washington, provide computer instruction during lunch breaks, and have NDU librarians give detailed training on how to use library online resources, which are available to our participants for the rest of their lives. In addition, students receive training on Blackboard (the NDU Web site interface) and the NESACenter alumni Web site, which has a document library in multiple languages.

### Alumni Community Chapters

In direct support of the National Security Strategy, DOD, and State Department policy, the NESACenter has launched its community chapter program, which will foster stronger civil-military relations and promote regional cooperation among senior-level NESACenter region leaders. In support of the Office of the Secretary of Defense's strategic communication policy guidance, the community chapters will serve simultaneously as outreach activities and increase our already extensive two-way communication with the region. Active participation in these chapters will allow community members to network with U.S. officials as well as colleagues in their country and region.

Programs initiated by these chapters will continue to advance U.S. security policy, strengthen relationships in local governments, and enhance regional cooperation. They also will provide a means for the center to maintain contact with its alumni community, communicate up-to-date U.S. policy on the Near East and South Asia, and share information about activities and promotions of other community members and chapters. We are looking into linking our alumni chapters to the regional network of strategic studies centers wherever possible.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen stated, "How we stay engaged around the world, which we must do, how we build and maintain partnerships, which we must do, will largely determine our ability over the long term to do for the nation all that it expects of us."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in February 2006, Ambassador Eric Edelman, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, made it clear that the regional centers should "focus on improving networks and alumni outreach efforts . . . to communicate better." The NESACenter encapsulates these very ideas in its daily activities in the United States, its region, and around the world. **JFQ**

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Lubold, "For Chairman of Joint Chiefs, A Partner-BUILDER," *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 1, 2007.